

## OIG HOTLINE PROCEDURES

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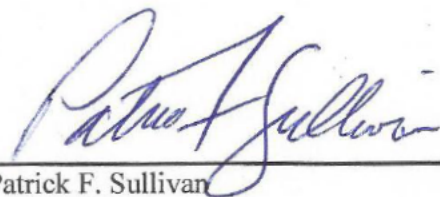
OIG PROCEDURE 219

OIG HOTLINE PROCEDURES

These procedures establish processes for the operation of an Office of Inspector General hotline, under the direction of the Assistant Inspector General for Investigations, to receive, review and refer complaints alleging fraud, waste, abuse, mismanagement or criminal activity in programs and operations of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board. In addition, the hotline receives complaints and allegations that may improve the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of agency programs and prevent fraud, waste and mismanagement.

### FILING INSTRUCTIONS

Establish Procedure 219 related to Policy 219, *OIG Hotline Policy*, dated 07/17/2014



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## SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 PURPOSE. This procedure assigns responsibilities and prescribes procedures for the operation of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) Hotline Program (hereafter referred to as the “hotline”) for matters involving the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board (CSB). It also implements the hotline quality assurance review program to provide oversight of the hotline and maintain the integrity of the hotline process. Moreover, it provides that complainants’ identities will be kept confidential unless consent to disclose is given or the Inspector General (IG) determines that disclosure is unavoidable during the investigation or review.
- 1.2 BACKGROUND. The OIG uses a hotline to receive complaints and information alleging fraud, waste, abuse, mismanagement or criminal activity associated with EPA and CSB programs and operations, including violations of law, rules or regulations by employees, program participants and others. The IG Act of 1978, as amended, 5 U.S.C. Appendix 3, mandates that the OIG’s website contain a mechanism such as a hotline by which individuals can anonymously submit complaints. All OIG employees should be familiar with the hotline policy and procedures. The hotline is the portal for reporting complaints regarding alleged fraud, waste, abuse, mismanagement or criminal activity associated with EPA and CSB programs or operations. The OIG’s Office of Investigations (OI) manages the hotline. The hotline receives complaints and concerns on EPA or non-EPA matters that do not necessarily pertain to fraud, waste and abuse. The hotline evaluates these types of complaints and concerns and they are referred appropriately. In addition, telephone callers to the hotline are provided appropriate telephone numbers for matters that are not under the purview of the EPA OIG.
- 1.3 DEFINITIONS AND GUIDANCE.
- a. Complaint. Allegations of possible wrongdoing involving an EPA or CSB program, grant, contract, employee or operation reported to the hotline. The hotline may receive complaints not under the purview of the EPA or CSB, and such complaints will be processed accordingly.
  - b. Referral for Action Within the OIG. After receiving complaints through the hotline, OI provides complaints for review and resolution to an Assistant Inspector General (AIG). After receiving a referral for action, the AIG will provide the hotline an acknowledgement of receipt (attachment 1) or electronic message within 5 calendar days. The AIG of a referral for action is required to determine an appropriate course of action, which may include a review, inquiry, investigation, evaluation or audit. In addition, the AIG may conclude that no OIG action is warranted or defer consideration of the complaint until a later date. The receiving AIG office will provide the hotline with the final disposition or status (report, memorandum, letter, etc.) for when the hotline action is completed. The hotline will notify the complainant,

if known, when the hotline action is completed and what the action was. A subsequent hotline communication to the complainant will be requested if there is OIG activity. Attachment 3 provides a sample.

- c. Referral for Action Outside the OIG. After receiving complaints through the hotline, OI provides complaints for review and resolution to other offices—including other offices within the EPA, CSB, and other departments and agencies—through a referral for action. For the hotline referrals outside the OIG, an acknowledgement or receipt can only be requested. For complaints referred outside the OIG, the OIG hotline may request final disposition or update from the applicable office.
  - d. Referral for Information. Referrals for information should be used for complaints or matters that do not appear to merit an inquiry but nonetheless should be brought to the attention of the responsible official. OIG will request the recipient of a referral for information to provide the OIG hotline an acknowledgement of receipt (attachment 1) or electronic message within 5 calendar days of receiving the referral. Should an OIG receiving office take action on the referral for information, the office will provide the hotline the final product (report, memorandum, letter, etc.). OIG may request that other EPA and CSB offices do the same.
  - e. No Action and No Referral. The hotline receives complaints, allegations or other matters that do not merit any action or referral. These items are entered and maintained in the hotline database and are available for future reference. The hotline may or may not provide an acknowledgement for these types of items.
- 1.4 IDENTIFYING HOTLINE COMPLAINTS. If an OIG employee is approached with a complaint, the complaint should be referred directly to the hotline. It is important to determine whether the complainant wants to remain anonymous or be considered a confidential source when recording or accepting the information. The hotline will acknowledge receipt of the complaint (attachment 2) if the source is known. For complainants choosing to remain anonymous or who do not provide contact information, contact cannot be maintained. If the hotline complaint received falls outside of the OIG's jurisdiction, other systems of redress may be available (such as consumer, personnel, union or Equal Employment Opportunity avenues). The hotline may refer all such complaints to the appropriate entity or provide the complainant with contact information. These may or may not be assigned a hotline number.

- 1.5 COMPLAINTS REGARDING OIG EMPLOYEES AND SENIOR AGENCY OFFICIALS. The Assistant Inspector General for Investigations (AIGI) will inform the IG or DIG of any complaint received concerning an OIG employee and any complaint of criminal activity or other serious misconduct involving other EPA or CSB employees at grade levels GS-15 and higher within 24 hours of receipt of the complaint. In accordance with OIG Policy 503, any complaint involving an OIG employee, regardless of grade level, will be immediately referred to the AIGI. The AIGI will immediately refer to the Integrity Committee of the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency any complaints involving the IG, DIG or other senior OIG official. The hotline manager will report any complaints involving the AIGI to the IG and DIG.

## SECTION 2. RESPONSIBILITIES

- 2.1 ASSISTANT INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR INVESTIGATIONS. The AIGI shall:

- a. Operate an open and accessible line of communication (a hotline) for receiving complaints of fraud, waste, abuse and mismanagement involving EPA and CSB programs and operations, and complaints of employee or other misconduct.
- b. Assign trained staff to receive, document and analyze hotline complaints from telephone calls, mail, email and faxes. This is to include appointing a hotline manager.
- c. Conduct periodic quality assurance reviews of hotline operations.
- d. Maintain a database and records to record the status of open, pending and closed hotline complaints. The OI hotline staff shall maintain complete documentation of all complaints received and provide monthly status and disposition reports to the IG, DIG and AIGI. Records will be maintained for 10 years in accordance with the EPA Records Control Schedule 703. Each complaint will be assigned a serialized control number for tracking and accountability.

- 2.2 ASSISTANT INSPECTORS GENERAL. All AIGs shall:

- a. Provide an acknowledgement of receipt (attachment 1) or electronic message to the hotline within 5 calendar days of receiving a referral for action or information.
- b. Determine appropriate action for matters referred by the hotline office and keep hotline staff updated on the status.
  - (1) Provide updates regarding open or closed status to the hotline two times each fiscal year on all open referrals. These status updates will be used by the hotline for reporting statistics in the Semiannual Report to Congress and are to be provided to OI by April 10 and October 10.



- (2) Evaluate the hotline referrals and determine the most appropriate course of action. Each AIG will establish a system for his or her respective hotline referrals.
- (3) Provide the OIG hotline staff the final product for all referrals via email.
- (4) Hotline referrals that involve both OI and other OIG components may require special handling. Assigned staff outside OI should communicate with OI to ensure that any non-investigative work activity does not interfere with planned OI activities or Department of Justice prosecution actions. Coordination of these referrals may allow work to be conducted concurrently by OI and other OIG components.

c. Ensure their staffs follow the hotline policy and procedures.

### 2.3 ALL OTHER EPA OFFICES, CSB, AND OTHER DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES.

These organizations:

- a. Will be requested to provide an acknowledgement receipt of a hotline referred for action or for information within 5 calendar days using the hotline receipt form (attachment 1) or by electronic message.
- b. May be requested to provide an update to the hotline 180 days after receipt of the referral and provide the hotline with their final reporting to the complainant for inclusion in the hotline file and database.

### 2.4 OIG OFFICE OF COUNSEL.

When requested, Office of Counsel will review applicable hotline referrals and all resulting correspondence for legal issues and opinions.

### 2.5 OIG OFFICE OF MISSION SYSTEMS.

This office is responsible for maintaining the hotline's IGEMS database and providing support as requested.

## 2.6 OIG STAFF.

- a. All OIG employees should be familiar with the hotline policy and procedures.
- b. Complaints that involve an exceptional public health or safety emergency may not be classified as a hotline and will not follow these procedures. OIG staff should, as appropriate, immediately assist the complainant(s) with contacting the appropriate local, state or federal responders. These types of complaints should be reported to the appropriate OIG supervisor immediately.
- c. OIG staff should not update a complainant on the status of his or her complaint. However, OIG staff may need to interview or seek to obtain additional information from complainants. During these occasions, OIG staff may answer questions about the status (e.g., timeframe, scope) of the OIG review. However, as a general practice, OIG staff should not regularly update the complainants on the status of an inquiry and should refer complainants to the OIG hotline when contacted.
- d. Time used for initial review, triage and assessment of hotline complaints should be charged in IGEMS to the indirect time code established for that purpose.
- e. Once a hotline complaint is determined to have merit for further audit, evaluation or investigation, an assignment or case should be opened and direct time should be charged to that assignment or case number in IGEMS.

## **SECTION 3. PROCEDURES / REQUIREMENTS**

### 3.1 OIG HOTLINE STAFF. OIG hotline staff shall:

- a. Obtain from the complainant sufficient information necessary to ascertain whether and where to refer the complaint to an appropriate source for action or information.
- b. Document pertinent information of complaints meriting referral.
- c. Assign a serialized control number for tracking hotline referrals for action and information. Evaluate each complaint to determine whether it is the responsibility of the OIG, EPA or CSB, or within the jurisdiction of another federal agency or state or local agency. Complaints that do not warrant any action are filed as no action.

- d. If a complainant is a federal employee, a former employee, or an applicant for federal employment (and when specified, non-federal employees), in addition to assigning the complaint for handling and disposition in accordance with the procedures, hotline staff will advise the complainants to contact the Whistleblower Protection Ombudsman within the OIG, Office of Counsel.
- e. Initial complaints that are complex or sensitive may need special handling. The hotline staff for these types of complaints may contact the IG, DIG, AIGs and Deputy AIGs as necessary to ensure proper handling and disposition. Details of the coordination shall be documented in the hotline complaint file for any future reference. In addition, communication with complainants for these type of complaints should be coordinated with the Office of Counsel.
- f. Send a memorandum or letter to the appropriate AIG, other EPA office, CSB, or other department or agency for each complaint referred, indicating whether the referral is for action or information. The non-receiving AIGs for the Office of Audit and Office of Program Evaluation referrals will be copied for referrals for action and information only. Include any information relative to the complaint. For complaints related to OIG employees, the hotline staff will refer the complaints to the IG, DIG or AIG. Complaints concerning EPA or CSB employees or potential criminal violations will be referred to the AIG. Non-criminal complaints related to contracts, grants, or other economy and efficiency issues will be referred to the OIG Office of Audit. Complaints related to programmatic concerns or program or activity mismanagement will be referred to the OIG Office of Program Evaluation. Complaints that present legal issues will be referred to the OIG Office of Counsel. The hotline staff may confer with the applicable AIG(s) before a formal referral is prepared to determine whether the complaint can be handled by the AIG's office. Referral may be reassigned by contacting the hotline.
- g. Ensure controls are in place to provide maximum protection for the identity of all hotline complainants who ask for confidentiality or anonymity. However, if a complainant requests confidentiality, they should be informed that his or her identity will be shared with the investigating agent (if there is one) but will not be disclosed outside of the OIG unless the complainant consents or the IG determines it is unavoidable (e.g., to comply with a court order). The investigating agent may not disclose the complainant's identity unless he or she gains the complainant's consent or is directed to do so by the IG.
- h. Ensure that individuals who initiate a complaint or provide information to the hotline understand that they are not required to discuss their complaint or related information with anyone other than the investigator/auditor/analyst assigned.



- i. Ensure completed hotline files are retained in accordance with the EPA records schedule. Close the file on referrals to agencies or offices outside of the EPA OIG.
- j. Maintain an active hotline publicity campaign using official notices, posters, telephone directories and other media. Implement outreach programs to encourage employees and the public to identify and report fraud, waste, abuse, mismanagement or other misconduct in EPA/CSB programs and operations. The hotline can be reached at the following telephone numbers: 1-888-546-8740 (toll-free) and 202-566-2476 (commercial). Mailed correspondence should be addressed to the: EPA Inspector General Hotline, 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW (2431T), Washington, DC 20460. Correspondence can also be sent via email to [OIG\\_Hotline@epa.gov](mailto:OIG_Hotline@epa.gov) or via fax at 202-566-2599.
- k. Ensure the accuracy of all information entered into the IGEMS hotline database.
- l. All hotline communication or correspondence with members of Congress shall be coordinated through the OIG's Office of Counsel and Congressional and Public Affairs.

Procedure Number: 219

Approval Date: 07/17/2014

Responsible Office: OI

Review Date: 07/17/2017

**Attachment 1**  
**EPA OIG Hotline Receipt Form**



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

OFFICE OF  
INSPECTOR GENERAL

**EPA OIG HOTLINE RECEIPT**

Hotline # \_\_\_\_\_

Referred to: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Received by: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE RETURN THIS RECEIPT TO THE HOTLINE STAFF WITHIN FIVE DAYS IN ORDER TO ENSURE  
CONFIRMATION OF HOTLINE REFERRALS**

EMAIL: [OIG\\_Hotline @epa.gov](mailto:OIG_Hotline@epa.gov)

FAX: 202-566-2599

Address:

OIG Hotline, 1200 Pennsylvania Ave NW (2431T), Washington DC 20460

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## **Attachment 2 Letter of Acknowledgment of Complaint**



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

OFFICE OF  
INSPECTOR GENERAL

[MM DD, YY]

Ms. Jane Doe  
Address  
[City, spell out state##postal code]

RE: Hotline Number 2013-XXX

Dear Ms. Doe:

Thank you for your [mm dd, yy,] [call/letter/fax/email] to the Fraud, Waste and Abuse Hotline of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Inspector General (OIG).

We assigned EPA OIG Hotline No. 2014-XXX to document receipt of your concerns about [briefly describe concern]. Information pertaining to your concerns has also been forwarded to [specify office] for review. Following this review, a determination will be made as to the most appropriate course of action.

The OIG appreciates your interest in protecting human health and the environment. If you have additional questions, please do not hesitate to call me at (202) 566-2476. The address for the Hotline is 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW (2431T), Washington, DC 20460.

Sincerely,

Hotline Manager  
Office of Investigations

Procedure Number: 219

Approval Date: 07/17/2014

Responsible Office: OI

Review Date: 07/17/2017

### **Attachment 3**

### **Sample Final Letter to Complainant**



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

OFFICE OF  
INSPECTOR GENERAL

[MM DD, YY]

Ms. Jane Doe  
Address  
[City, spell out state##postal code]

Dear Ms. Doe:

Thank you for your recent inquiry for your client, John Smith. The Fraud, Waste and Abuse Hotline of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Inspector General (OIG) receives complaints of fraud, waste and abuse within EPA programs and operations, including mismanagement or violations of law, rules or regulations by EPA employees or program participants.

For this complaint we established EPA OIG Hotline No. 2014-XXX. To assist you in the resolution of your concerns, we referred your information to the EPA OIG Office of Counsel. This office has completed its review and determined that this matter deals with property trespass claims between adjoining property owners. This issue is not under the purview of the EPA OIG.

Should you uncover instances of fraud, waste and abuse within EPA programs or operations, please contact the OIG Hotline. We appreciate your support in protecting human health and the environment. If you have any further complaints please send them to: EPA Hotline, 1200 Pennsylvania Ave (2431T), Washington, DC 20460; or call (202) 566-2476

Sincerely,

Hotline Manager  
Office of Investigations